



**For Immediate Release  
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**Contact: Joe Ferson – 617-626-1119  
Charles Burnham – 413-256-1601**

## **MASSACHUSETTS BUREAU OF FORESTRY NOTES THE RISE OF WINTER MOTH**

The sudden rise of the winter moth (*Operophtera brumata*) has prompted inquiries from residents and local officials to the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation's Bureau of Forestry. In response, DCR wishes to inform the public on what steps are being taken to address the situation.

- DCR has prepared an informational [Winter Moth Fact Sheet](#) for the general public with information and suggestions about the winter moth.
- DCR is currently working in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service, the University of Massachusetts, and the Plymouth County Cooperative Extension on a pilot program to release several hundred parasitic flies to combat the winter moth. The first release was done in May of this year and more releases of the flies are planned at various locations in spring 2006.

The winter moth, which defoliated approximately 23,500 acres in the eastern part of the state this year, is native to Europe and considered an invasive species here. While the spread of this species is new to New England, it has also been found in Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and the Pacific Northwest for decades. While currently Massachusetts is the only New England state with confirmed winter moth populations, there are unconfirmed reports of winter moth populations in southern New Hampshire and Rhode Island.

"For several years, deciduous trees in coastal Massachusetts from Cape Cod to Gloucester have experienced severe defoliation by a caterpillar that was previously unseen in the Commonwealth," said Charles Burnham, head of DCR's Office of Forest Health.

Burnham also explained the life cycle of the insect. "When the caterpillar has completed feeding, it enters the ground where it transforms into a small brown moth," he noted. "This moth usually emerges from its earthen resting place between Thanksgiving and Christmas with the sole purpose of mating and laying eggs. These eggs will hatch the following spring, producing more caterpillars." He also noted that attempting to kill the insects in their moth stage is considered fruitless.

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COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS · EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

Department of Conservation and Recreation  
251 Causeway Street, Suite 600  
Boston MA 02114-2119  
617-626-1250 617-626-1351 Fax  
[www.mass.gov/dcr](http://www.mass.gov/dcr)



Mitt Romney  
Governor

Kerry Healey  
Lt. Governor

Stephen R. Pritchard, Secretary  
Executive Office of Environmental Affairs

Stephen H. Burrington, Commissioner  
Department of Conservation & Recreation

DCR estimates that it will be several years before it can be determined whether or not the parasitic flies have had an impact on the winter moth population. For currently defoliated trees, an application of a registered pesticide in the spring may be warranted. More information on registered pesticides can be obtained at local extension service offices, or at [www.umassgreeninfo.org/fact\\_sheets](http://www.umassgreeninfo.org/fact_sheets).

The *Winter Moth Fact Sheet* is posted on the DCR's website at [www.mass.gov/dcr/news.htm](http://www.mass.gov/dcr/news.htm). Copies can also be requested by calling the DCR Boston Office at 617-626-1250 or sending an email to [MassParks@state.ma.us](mailto:MassParks@state.ma.us) (subject line: "winter moth fact sheet"). For additional information about the winter moth, contact the DCR Forest Health Program in Amherst at 413-256-1601.

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